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ABSTRACT

The Education for All: Making It Work series is a major international interagency program designed to collect, analyze, and promote successful basic education projects in the least developed and developing countries. This project report describes the innovative work being undertaken in adolescent girls' camps in Lok Jumbish (Rajasthan, India). Rajasthan, the second largest state in India, symbolizes India's hot, arid zone. More than 51 million people reside there in a complex society, still largely feudal, with various types of communities and a population density of 129 persons per square kilometer. The situation of women is especially difficult. Rajasthan has a live and rich culture. Lok Jumbish (LJ) started in 1992; Lok means "people" and Jumbish means "movement." This is the essence of the approach to education. LJ works at several levels and directions, but the core philosophy is mobilization of the community for education. Women's development, teacher training, construction of school buildings, development of textbooks, health and awareness programs, and highly motivated personnel are the characteristics of the approach. LJ works closely with nongovernmental organizations (NGO) both at the national and state levels. The report is divided into nine sections: (1) "Rajasthan The Land and the People"; (2) "Lok Jumbish's Approach to Education"; (3) "Searching for Directions"; (4) "Planning and the Community"; (5) "Training and Academic Inputs"; (6) "Functioning of the Camps"; (7) "Learning to Learn"; (8) "Follow-Up"; and (9) "Social Impact." (BT)

**Taking Flight: Adolescent Girls' Camps
in Lok Jumbish of Rajasthan, India
Education for All: Making It Work
Innovation Series
No. 14**

Asia-Pacific Centre of Educational Innovation for Development (ACEID)
United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (PROAP)

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About the Project . . .

The **Education for all: Making it Work: Innovation Series** is a major international program designed to collect, analyse and promote successful basic education projects in the least developed and developing countries.

On all accounts, the Series (thirteen to date) has proven to be very successful in achieving the goal of the program, namely, to publicise sustainable innovations. They were also able to bring to life visions of the World Education in Jomtien that *"All children, young people and adults have the right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term, an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be"*.

In this millenium year 2000, ten years after the Jomtien Conference, the World Education Forum in Dakar Senegal in April 2000, adopted a Framework for Action committed to achieving quality basic education for all, with education for girls, ethnic minorities, disadvantaged group in the least developed and developing countries as the main focus.

The Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, in support to this commitment has declared that all aspects of UNESCO activities should focus on contributing to basic education as part of the **Global Action Plan**. *"Basic education remains the only hope of enabling all nations to establish a truly democratic culture and thereby a degree of political stability which is essential if development is to go hand in hand with respect for human rights"*. It is therefore very timely that **Taking Flight**, the fourteenth publication in the Education For All: Making It Work: Innovation Series, should be published. **Taking Flight** describes the innovative work being undertaken in Adolescent Girls' Camps in Lok Jumbish of Rajasthan, India.

The responsibility for identifying sustainable innovations for this series, making the arrangement for text and visual aids for publications, editing and lay-outing have been passed from UNESCO Headquarters to PROAP, undertaken by the unit concerned with educational innovations, namely ACEID.

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Table of Contents

		Page 3 RAJASTHAN – THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE
Page 5 LOK JUMBISH'S APPROACH TO EDUCATION		
		Page 8 SEARCHING FOR DIRECTIONS
Page 10 PLANNING AND THE COMMUNITY		
		Page 12 TRAINING AND ACADEMIC INPUTS
Page 15 THE FUNCTIONING OF THE CAMPS		
		Page 17 LEARNING TO LEARN
Page 22 FOLLOW-UP		
		Page 23 SOCIAL IMPACT

Rajasthan-Land of the People

Rajasthan symbolizes India's hot, arid zone. It is the second largest state of India comprising 11% of the land area. The oldest mountain range in the world, the Aravallis, divides Rajasthan into eastern and western parts. The western, rain starved desert area called Thar, has barely enough vegetation to support a large population, both human and cattle. The southern region has monsoon-enriched forests.

More than 51 million people live in Rajasthan. It has a complex society, still largely feudal, with all types of communities living in a density of 129 persons per square kilometer. Tribal communities, many of them nomadic, live in habitations several miles from the nearest road, especially in the southern and western parts of the state. There are more than 40,000 inhabited villages. Availability of water, or the lack of it, dominates the life of the people. Communication and transport are largely by traditional means, which has led to isolated communities developing their own culture, rituals and festivals.

Rajasthan has a live and rich culture. Its people have produced beautiful architecture, an outstanding community-built water harvesting system, a history of astronomy, a rich heritage of music, dance, folklore, painting, textiles and tradition of conservation of natural resources. The social structure is complex, dominated by a caste system that traditionally determines an individual's whole life. It is less rigid now, with the development of agriculture, irrigation, industries, roads, radio, television and tourism already altering the traditional patterns of life. Open to influences from the world outside their knowledge and control, many of the less adaptable communities are facing challenges that have made them vulnerable to exploitation,



if not extinction.

The situation of women is especially difficult. They lead harsh lives on the edges of survival – their life is dominated by search for water, fuel and growing sparse crops. The traditional role relegates women to voiceless existence, born to serve the family. Female infanticide is practiced in many areas. The girl child takes many responsibilities – tending cattle, taking care of siblings, cooking for the family, fetching water, collecting firewood for cooking. The average age of marriage for girls is a very low 14 years. In fact marriages of even infants are solemnised, though the girl may go to her husband's house only after entering puberty. This tradition results in parents not educating their daughters for fear of social disapproval, since the movement of women outside their home is strictly regulated. One can travel for miles without meeting even one literate woman.

India's three most educationally backward districts, Jaisalmer, Barmer and Jalore are all in Rajasthan, where the literacy rate among women is negligible.

However, not all human development statistics in Rajasthan are grim.

The average life expectancy has improved, infant mortality and maternal mortality rate have declined, canal irrigation has vastly expanded, and potable water is available to more people. But, the population growth rate is a high 2.5 percent per annum, and the sex ratio is significantly unequal – only 910 women per thousand men.

Thus access to a minimum standard of living is a big question mark.

Where survival is at stake, education receives a low priority.

In Rajasthan, as in much of the populous northern and central states, the school system is spread thinly. The infrastructure is concentrated in urban and semi-urban areas.

Financial resources are stretched, schoolteachers are unwilling to live in remote rural areas, the curriculum is far removed from the context of the children, and the basic facilities in schools are scarce. The community feels uninvolved with the school system, neither the school environment nor its quality attracts them or their children. This has remained so even in the 1990s when India has insulated societies all over the world, and at a time when the human development record of a country comes under close international scrutiny.



Rajasthan : indicators

Area :	342,239 square km
Population :	51 million
Infant mortality :	85 per 1000 live births
Under-5 child mortality :	127 per 1000 births
Literacy :	38.8 percent
Male :	55.1 percent
Female :	20.8 percent

Children
in 6-14 years age group : 12.6 million

Number of Primary and Upper Primary schools :	46,543
Number of Teachers :	186,687
Pupil-Teacher ratio :	4 7
Percentage of women teachers :	27 in primary 24 in Upper Primary
Dropout rate :	64.7 percent
Boys :	61.2 percent
Girls :	72.5 percent

Sources: Census of India 1991, Rajasthan
Selected Educational Statistics, 1996-97,
Government of India

Lok Jumbish Approach to Education

Lok Jumbish started in 1992. **Lok** means people and **Jumbish** means movement – a **people's movement for education**. *This is the essence of the approach to education.*

Lok Jumbish (henceforth referred to as LJ) is designed as an administratively autonomous project of the governments of India and Rajasthan. LJ developed its own approach to the challenge of the Universalisation of Primary Education.

The approach taken by LJ is comprehensive and multi-pronged. It works at several levels and directions. The core philosophy is mobilisation of the community for education. Women's development, teachers training, construction of school buildings, development of textbooks, health and awareness programs, and highly motivated personnel are the characteristics of this approach. Women are the key focus area. LJ works closely with NGOs both at the national and state levels. In fact, these NGOs implement several LJ community mobilisation and academic programs.

LJ's process-based programmes

The LJ approach involves careful analysis of the status and obstacles to education in every village, indeed in every habitation. A district is the basic administrative unit of the government of a state like Rajasthan. The district is further divided into blocks, with 6-12 blocks in a district. LJ works in nearly



7000 villages in 75 blocks of the state with a population of 11 million. The administrative unit for LJ is a cluster, which is a group of 25-30 villages. There may be 5-9 such clusters in a block. LJ's efforts are directed at removing the obstacles to children's education. Contrary to popular myths, LJ believes that parents are interested in sending their children to school when good quality education is made accessible to them. Therefore, the people themselves are responsible of monitoring education of children in their village.

The process of involving the people starts from the time LJ moves into any area. The initial efforts, called Environment Building, begin with a team of LJ staff in a cluster establishing good relations with the community in the village. Regular visits are made to the village and meeting held to find out the people's problems. A core Team of committed men and women is formed by consensus. After training, this team conducts a survey recording educational status of every household. A village map is prepared which, with the help of symbols, shows the people the level of education in each house. This lively, participatory process called School-Mapping, stretches over several weeks.

Parallel to this process, a Women's Group is formed and trained. The necessity of a Women's Group right from the start has emerged strongly since the rigid social structure prevents women from speaking in public. And, participation of women is crucial, given their social subordination and lack of literacy. The women, after an initial reluctance stemming from fear of social disapproval and lack of confidence, show a tremendous enthusiasm in the whole process, taking on many responsibilities.

At the end of the School Mapping, the whole village analyses the reasons for children not going to school. In most places, it was found that even when there is a school, it is not functioning properly due to lack of teachers or minimum facilities. Girls were not going because the parents would not allow them to walk long distances to attend formal or non-formal night schools. There was also some reluctance because only male teachers staff most schools. *The combination of geography and culture was becoming a major obstacle in providing primary education for girls.*



LJ has designed many programmes to suit the needs of different blocks. In fact, decentralisation is built into the management structure, including financial management. Combined with careful selection of dynamic and inspired workers, strategies are designed to suit the circumstances of each cluster. These strategies called Micro-planning, are being implemented with the village Core Team, Women's Group, and the local schoolteachers. A whole range of activities are involved in Micro-planning like monitoring enrollment and retention in schools, starting non-formal centers, repair or construction of school buildings, school health program, forum for adolescent girls, and many others.

Bringing about improvements in the state run school system is the other aspect of LJ's approach. This ranges from motivational and curriculum based training of teachers, producing suitable textbooks up to upper primary level, drawing up standards and supplying good quality equipment and teaching learning materials for all schools in the project area. LJ has built up a network of non-formal education centers with local educated youth as instructors, which has become a major success story.

Creating innovative strategies

LJ recognises the desirability of multiple channels to education. Children who have been deprived of schooling can enter the non-formal stream at the age of nine years and enter the mainstream school after completing grade III, IV or V. This has enabled thousands of children to enter school.

Every LJ block has introduced its own innovations. Innovations are celebrated in LJ since they have proved to break deadlocks in seemingly impossible-to-solve situations. The gusto with which innovations flourish is representative of the success of decentralised, people-focussed planning.

Some major LJ innovations are Women's Residential Institutes for Training and Education (to overcome shortage of women workers), Women Teachers Forum (to strengthen and inspire women teachers), Adolescent Girls Camps (to improve school environment towards girls), Seasonal Hostels (for children of migratory laborers), Education and Development of Children with a Disability, and Urdu language based education for Muslim Children.



Searching for Directions

How it began?

Monitoring girl's participation in harsh desert and deep forest areas revealed that despite all efforts a large numbers of girls, particularly adolescent girls, had remained outside the ambit of primary education. Survival is very difficult in these regions, and consequently the girl child has to fulfil many more household duties. A new direction, a fresh strategy has to be explored to bring these girls to school.

Inspiration came from across the country. In 1995, LJ personnel visited the MV Foundation, an NGO in the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. MVF works with child labor, and as part of their work to rehabilitate the children, runs residential course to enable children, mostly boys, to enter the state-run schools at an appropriate level. Murari Lal Thanvi was the leader of the team that went to MVF. He was inspired by the success of these children, and felt that a similar experiment could be an answer for the girls of western Rajasthan. As an assistant project Officer in Pokran Block of Jaisalmer district, Lalji as he is popularly known, had grappled with feeling of failure to educate girls. He and his colleagues who visited MVF interacted with the staff of neighboring projects and Bikaner-based LJ leadership. Lalji's innovative spirit was encouraged, and he began to dream of camps for the basic education of adolescent girls who could not go to any school.

A group got formed to further pursue the matter. It comprised of Lalji, block Project Officers of Jodhpur and Bikaner districts, a few cluster level workers and some non-formal education instructors and schoolteachers. After many discussions, it was decided that the camp mode of education needed to be tested. A 45-day non-residential camp was organised in May -June 1995 for 60 girls from LJ's non-formal education centers of Bithdi cluster in Phalodi block. The aim of the camp was to enable older girls in the non-formal center to complete education of at least first grade level. Studying with concentration for the whole day during the camp, the girls finished grade I. They managed to complete grade II. They even started grade III.



Greatly encouraged by the results of this camp, four-month long residential camps were proposed in three blocks – two camps in Bikaner and one each in Pokran and Phalodi blocks. The management of LJ, with Lalji as the coordinator approved the proposals.

For Lalji's colleagues, a residential camp for girls was the greatest challenge they had faced so far. They were all experienced workers of LJ but this seemed too bold and ambitious a project. They were uncertain about the willingness of communities – which do not permit interaction between men and women and keep the women veiled. Would they allow girls nearing marriageable age to leave home to live and learn in a camp?

A community's honor is from women's virtue, the security of the girls would cause major tensions. And the work these girls do at home or as agricultural workers? Who will compensate for that? How will women teachers willing to stay in camps for months be found? What about food, place to stay? Many of these questions got answered as the workers started discussing the camps in the villages. People were genuinely interested in education. They were willing to consider sending their daughters if some other girls in the villages were also going. And the credibility LJ had built up in the community was such that, incredibly, the impossible started seeming possible.

Evolving the strategy

The workers started touring villages where School Mapping processes indicated poor attendance of girls in primary school and non-formal centers. Based on this information, in a meeting held in August 1996, the workers of the three blocks worked out the strategy for organising the camps.

One set of management tasks was the selection and training of teachers, development of modules for teachers' training and 4-month teaching course. The other was working with the community, including the identification of girls, obtaining written permission of their parents, holding workshops, fair and excursions to enthuse the parents in allowing girls to stay camps, and several other village specific problems.

It took months of hard work by many people.

The first series was held in January 1997 with more than a hundred girls per camp. Its experiences strongly showed the camps needed to be six months long to enable the girls to reach grade four or five level. Subsequently, six camps in the second series and fourteen camps in the third series were of six months duration.

The fourth in the series of **Adolescent Girls** camps took place in six locations in Rajasthan with UNICEF as sponsor. More than two thousand five hundred girls have benefited from these camps. Many of them were performing well in the local schools – in fact outshining their brothers.

Issues of Planning

The story of the organization of camps for adolescent girls begins with a series of questions. What are the factors to be considered in bringing the girls to residential learning camps? Where

Planning and the Community

To find the patience to endlessly debate with the community? How much flexibility and quick thinking is required in solving problems? How to inculcate a sense of love and responsibility among the teachers towards the girls' welfare.

Insights have come only from a sustained willingness to learn and adapt. Personal commitment of the workers to the program has been vital, since they interact with the community and shoulder the major responsibility for the safety of the young girls.

Establishing a management system

LJ's partner NGOs have been involved with the organisation of the **Adolescent Girls** Camps in their blocks. The management group for the camps is drawn from both LJ and the NGOs. At the state level, the management group includes the project coordinator, LJ's district level area coordinator, block-level camp coordinator the head teacher of each camp, and master trainers for academic training. They meet every month to plan and report; both and after the camps start functioning. Planning the actual logistics, like selection of camp-site, food and water arrangements, medical facilities, and day to day management are largely at the discretion of the LJ team at the block level. Management responsibilities for the camps are clearly defined in the camps' block-level team. Apart from regular meetings, a lot of communication is done by telephone. The system of reporting and giving feedback, crucial for an experiment of this level, is drawn from the collective experiences of LJ and from every series of camps held.

Working with the community

The preliminary stages involved building an environment to recognise special needs for girls' education. Since LJ's cluster-level workers have a high degree of credibility, the people were willing to listen even if with disbelief! Parents, village core team and women's groups, representatives of local government, teachers – everyone was consulted and convinced at every step. LJ's non-formal instructors, like Thavar Khan of Pokran, played important role in this mobilisation as they are a part of the community and were experienced in involving parents in education.

The process of selecting the girls and teachers, physical arrangements for organising the camps is simultaneous with community mobilisation. This entire process initially took about six months but this gets reduced with experience.

The local LJ workers felt that it would be a good strategy to ask parents to visit their daughters in the camp on Sundays to observe their progress and be assured of their well-being. Another was to ask the girls to start writing postcards to their parents as soon as they could write which becomes a matter of pride for the whole village. Ability to write letters is, in fact, stated by the people as the single largest reason for sending adolescent daughters (who may live in a distant village or town after marriage) to the camps.

Insights

After the completion of the first series of camps, the achievements of the girls were widely disseminated, resulting to great demand from villages in several blocks. The camps broke the myth that tradition-bound communities do not wish to educate their daughters. When people get access to good

quality education in a caring environment, they do reach out to benefit from it. There are some other factors that contribute to the success of the camps, like its all-female environment, and the short duration of the course. The confidence-building environment created by LJ personnel is a crucial element.

With the completion of each series of camps, criteria for selection of girls are fine-tuned. Steps are taken to screen them carefully to ensure those girls from most deprived community and older age groups attend the camps. The tendency of privileged groups in villages to corner facilities is also checked at every stage.

It is fairly clear from LJ's experience that the goals of education planning cannot be achieved only by creating projects and physical facilities. The personal links of the workers with the people are crucial in the success of these efforts. Education for all requires the participation of all through community-centered process-based programs. This needs time, patience and a long-term commitment to the people.

The scope and work methods of the Camps are crystallising with every series. Every camp has been unique in its own way. Each camp has been a learning experience and evolved its own insights and achievements. The teachers, administrators and workers cherish their memories.



Training and Academic Inputs

The search for teachers

A major issue in organizing camps was finding women teachers who were willing to stay with other girls for so many months. To attract educated women who may be unemployed, it was decided to issue advertisements in newspapers all over Rajasthan. The minimum educational qualification was kept at senior secondary level.

The interviews with the aspiring teachers, conducted in a workshop format, were held in December 1996. The age of women from lower middle class with semi-urban background ranged from 20-30 years. Most of them were unmarried. Some were still studying. They were given complete information about the circumstances and living conditions in which the camps would be held and the responsibilities they would have to undertake.

Many women dropped out at this stage itself. The remaining were selected for motivation, capacity to live in difficult conditions and their willingness to learn. Experience of the camps has shown that the younger teachers are willing learners and could relate to their young charges better. This has now become a part of the collective wisdom of the camps.

The teachers, young and old, themselves come from difficult social and financial circumstances. The task of convincing their conservative parents about their security has to be done by the local LJ team. In fact strong relationships with the teachers' families have been established now, since the same set of teachers continued in the subsequent camps. All newly inducted teachers go through the same process.



Planning the training

Teachers' training is planned to provide scope for flexibility. Changes are made with the insights gained from each series of camps. It is carefully designed with the help of non-formal education instructors, master trainers and education planners. Non-formal education instructors provided the initial insights that laid the ground for community mobilisation and teachers' training. Master trainers are teachers in local government schools who have been trained in interactive teaching by Sandhan, an NGO serving as a resource institute for LJ. Mangi Lal Bishnoi, a dedicated master trainer, coordinates teachers' training. Some master trainers are regular visitors to the camps, and help teachers in their work. L.K. Lohmi, who has been associated with Sandhan, has been involved with the conceptual framework of teaching-learning processes of the camps. These processes are sensitive to the language and culture of the region.

The teachers' experience

The teachers go through an intensive training for 21 days at the end of which the best are selected based on sensitivity and crisis management potential. The training is rigorous and comprehensive – ranging from academic curriculum to games, composing and singing songs, painting, lesson planning, scholastic evaluation, health care, hygiene, and organisation of the classroom and living arrangements. Most important, they are trained to be sensitive about the care of girls who were leaving their homes for the first time – as were the teachers themselves.

The teachers form strong emotional bonds with each other during these intense, hectic long days of training. These bonds sustain them in the months that they are away from home. There is a time set aside each day for sharing of experiences. The local LJ workers visit them regularly and make them feel like a member of the LJ family. Their personal problems also need to be sorted out sometimes. The teachers are encouraged to work in small groups.

Planning for teaching-learning Processes

There are generally seven teachers in every camp. One of them is the coordinator, selected on the basis of leadership and management abilities. The teachers are assigned to different camps at the beginning of the training itself. There are two teachers for each subject in a camp – Language, Mathematics and Environment Studies. A two-week long refresher course is held before the commencement of every new series of camps. Here, they review the earlier experiences and plan for the new camp. They also have a chance to attend to problem areas in their own subject with the help of master trainers. The teachers plan their lessons on a weekly basis. This has come after the experience of the previous camps, where some groups of girls made rapid progress and others lagged behind due to less methodical approach of some teachers.

They are collectively responsible for the level of learning of the whole camp, and for the monitoring of the children and each other. The teachers spend the interim period between the training and the beginning of the camp in preparing teaching aids, such as flash cards, picture story charts, songs and many other activities according to the teaching module and their own talent. They also develop locally available, and ultimately very popular teaching materials for the purpose of teaching counting and geometry – such as clay, leaves, pebbles and pieces of wood. There is a small but well planned library in every camp, which houses story books, informative books, cartoons and magazines.

The teachers have developed creative and colorful new ways of displaying books; for example, on strings tied in all of the rooms, thus making the books more accessible to girls who have had little contact with printed material. The books are also used systematically according to the weekly plan. (For example, the teacher reads a part of a story and asks the girls to complete using the pictures).

Insights

The teachers' training methodology evolves and develops with each series of camps. The teachers themselves need to continue their commitment to the preparation of both the training and teaching modules since the success of the camps is crucially linked to the quality of the teachers. Preparing for a camp of this nature challenges everyone – teachers, planners and administrators alike.

Gyaneshwari – a teacher

Gyaneshwari is twenty-nine years old. She was married at an early age and has a young daughter attending school. She is the only educated woman in her own and in her in-laws large joint family. She managed to educate herself to achieve a Masters Degree.

Gyaneshwari felt frustrated with her traditional roles of daughter-in-law and mother. When LJ advertised for teachers for Adolescent Girls' Camps, she decided to apply despite the opposition of her family. She went for the interview feeling insecure and nervous. The details of the camps' requirements increased her tension. But, a determination to do something with her life and to be financially independent was strong.

She was elected. The interaction with other women and the refreshing nature of the training was inspiring. Her husband came with her from Jodhpur to check the organisation of the training. He was also taken to the campsite where she was to stay. Satisfied at last, he withdrew his opposition, convinced that she was working for a good cause. His sisters agreed to take care of her daughters.

Gyaneshwari's latent abilities had the chance to flourish. An excellent communicator and manager, she has shown great presence of mind while facing many crisis, such as during the illness of the girls when the camp was hit by a cyclone. The girls were sent home, and the teachers and LJ workers had to rebuild the storm-hit camp.

Gyaneshwari is now the head teacher at the Adolescent Girls' Camp in Bap, in Jodhpur district.

Her ability to communicate with the youngest and most reticent girls has led to her being put in charge of the 'difficult' group.

The Functioning of the Camps

The opening days

The opening days of the camp are a study in organized chaos. The girls, some of them married, arrive in large numbers escorted by their families, some of them with younger siblings who refused to part with them. Lists are prepared, living arrangements are shown, everyone eats together and this goes on for two to three days. In the first few weeks, the focus is on settling the girls into their **new home**.

The first weeks are crucial and for various reasons, some girls decided to leave. A few parents change their mind, many girls are too young to live on their own, others are found to be of school age and therefore not eligible for admission. Out of nearly two hundred girls, 130 or so remain. A few more drop out later if they cannot adjust to new environment. Usually there are 100-120 girls in every camp.

Learning to live together

Most girls insist on staying in the same room with the other girls from their village and community. One teacher (there are seven in each camp) is in charge of 15-20 girls. Every room has a leader who is informally chosen for initiative and ability to take responsibility. The leader reports any problems being faced by the girls to the teacher.

Language varies in every region of Rajasthan. Dialects too are different and are sometimes specific to peculiar communities. As a result, communication becomes tricky. The teachers may come from a city and not be able to fully understand the girls. The local LJ workers assist them in the initial days of the camp. The teachers usually learn fast. So do the girls. Within a month or two, Hindi becomes the language of the camp.

Food can become a major problem for the girls if it is too different from their normal diet. Due to health and management considerations, it often is different. This used to be a problem in the early days of the camps. Now, women cooks from the girls' villages are employed to cater them. Children of all castes and communities serve food and eat together. In a cast-ridden society, this is no mean achievement.

Utmost care is taken in the early days of the camps to prevent any illness. But it does happen: mainly upset stomachs. There have been some bad episodes of illness like malaria, which is endemic to Rajasthan. In Chohtan, a girl with an infectious itchy skin disease was unknowingly admitted to the camp and the next morning, three others started scratching themselves. They were isolated and treated. Unable to sleep away from their friends, they crept back into the room with other girls. The following morning saw 26 girls infected. This was a setback to the camp for a few days before the disease could be controlled.

The girls come from backward areas and many of them have only one set of clothes. Cleanliness becomes a challenge since they have to live so close to each other. Many of them suffer from lice and chronic health problems, while others are not familiar with indoor toilets and have to be trained to use them. The teacher becomes a mother and confidante for the girls. They all live together and share some

facilities, and soon the camp compound becomes home and is cleaned and decorated with great pride.

Establishing relationships

The girls are not used to interacting with strangers, not even with other girls. At first, they only interact with girls from their own village and community. The teachers make a systematic effort to help them interact with each other through games and exercises. This process takes at least a month and after six months, the group is united and it is traumatic for them to part with each other.

There is a manager to help teachers with the functioning of the camp. One person from the local LJ staff is assigned to the camp. Block and cluster level LJ personnel support the teachers without interfering in the camp's day-to-day schedule. Their role is generally to improve the academic quality of the camp's activities to ensure health care and sort out management difficulties. Throughout the six months, a core team comprising teachers, camp manager and the block coordinator meet everyday to review and plan logistical and academic details. The head teacher prepares a monthly report on academic progress and expenditure of money.

Insights

The question related to the expansion of the Adolescent Girls' Camps is often mired in comparisons with the cost of primary education in state-run schools. These two schooling systems are not comparable since the benefits received by each child are so different. The incalculable gains made by the girls need to be evaluated in social and human terms. The camps are training new generation of girls - learning to live together and living to learn together. It is not surprising that they are becoming role models for other girls in their villages.

Learning to Learn

Self awareness

The relationship of the girls with the teachers, whom they call Jiji (elder sister), is marked by emotional undertones. Finding in the teachers a kind of affection normally not given to a girl child, the girls learn to share feelings and confidences with the teachers. For the teachers, it is also a personal journey of joy and self-discovery. They feel a sense of pride and achievement, of having contributed positively to other lives and of enriching their own in a manner they could not even have dreamt earlier. The dynamics of each camp and its academic output depend to a great extent on this relationship. The relationship does not remain limited to the camps, they also correspond and visit each other even after the camp.

It is central to the success of the camps to understand the situation of the girl child at home. Bound in traditional roles since birth, they are used to being treated as inferior to their brothers. They suffer from low self-esteem and many of them are very shy. They assume they cannot learn anything except household chores or that they are like cattle that have to be guided by the superior wisdom of the men of the family. The central effort in the camps, therefore, is to give self-confidence to the girls about their own intelligence and talent, and to make them feel loved and respected. Only then education can empower and fulfill its role in improving the quality of the life of these girls on the threshold of adulthood.

Understanding the girls

The experience of the camps has shown that the girls learned a lot from camp has girls coming from varying backgrounds. A few of them have attended school for a year or so, some for only a few months and most of them not at all.

The girls may be able to understand concepts but may not be able to write them. A lot of emphasis is given to language skills, both reading and writing. Many girls can read and write alphabet and numbers in sequence without understanding it at all! All these varying levels of competencies are evaluated within the first few days of the camp, mainly through games and exercises and informal writing and recitation sessions. This is done in a manner that the girls are not conscious of being evaluated.

The evaluation forms the basis of formation of groups of girls with similar abilities that keep changing as the girls learn at their own pace. In fact, the girls' own knowledge and abilities form the foundation of the formal learning the three Rs.

Some of them have extraordinary skills and talents learnt from their environment, which unfortunately do not yet form a part of any evaluation. In Chohtan, girls from the Bhil tribe are skilled trackers - they can recognise footprints of their relatives, camels, even snakes, several days after they have passed by on sand. Some girls have a vast knowledge of vegetation and medicinal plants, or in treating sick cattle and many other skills that they are in danger of extinction in the collective wisdom of their community and that of the world as a whole. Tragically, these communities have learned to devalue their own knowledge systems.

Beginning to learn together

Competencies based on Minimum Levels of Learning form the basis of academic evaluation. The text books are the same as in the government primary schools (developed by Lok Jumbish). The three areas of study are Language, Mathematics and Environmental Studies. Apart from that, cleanliness, drawing, painting, creative, writing, singing, dancing, games, and participation in group

activities are encouraged.

The introduction to writing and language begins with identifying their own names in the first few days of the camps. This generates tremendous enthusiasm among the girls. They bombard the teachers with request to write the names of all members of their family on their palms, arms, clothes, exercise books – everything! Familiar words from their own environment are also a good beginning for teachers to understand the girls' lives and for the girls to relate to the learning system. They also begin to read names of other girls, recognising alphabet, and are well on their way to being prepared to learn more. In fact, this is the stage at which even the most reluctant learners, and loners, start communicating. Even those who want to go back home decide to stay to write with their new pencils and exercise books, chalks and slates!

The girls draw a lot of pictures and traditional designs. Rather, they draw on the floor – this is the way they decorate their homes. There is great artistry involved in this traditional art form practiced by women all over India. They are encouraged to do a lot of free hand drawing and geometrical shapes to begin to write with confidence.

A lot of the teaching-learning is done orally. Story telling and singing is integrated into the activities throughout the camp's duration but are especially important in the first few weeks to enable the girls to settle down in joyful atmosphere.

The academic sessions

The girls are divided into groups. The first group is those who cannot read or write at all, who in fact have to be taught how to hold chalk and slate. There are usually 6-7 groups categorised according to their level of skills. The groups are flexible and the girls move up the grades according to their own pace.

A typical day at the camp begins early in the morning. Physical exercises, collective all-religion prayers and breakfast are done before the first academic session, usually Language. The girls rest after lunch. There are two shorter sessions in the afternoon for Mathematics and Environmental studies. Evenings are lively with outdoor sports. The post-dinner time, called Bal Sabha, or children's gathering is for story-telling, singing and dancing. After a few weeks in the camps, the girls prefer to concentrate on completing their lessons and study till late at night.

Mathematics is understood readily by the girls. Many of them have rudimentary knowledge of the subject, being older, and having worked as farm labor, or sold milk, or kept household accounts. Since their understanding of the language is limited, they are not able to understand and solve written questions. So they express themselves orally. The teachers spend a lot of time with the girls to help them improve their understanding of mathematics.

Flexibility is observed in teaching of Environmental Studies. For example, there are chapters on religious festivals. The time of teaching, discussing and doing activities related to them coincides with the festival itself, and not the sequence of the chapter. In this way, the girls learn about other communities and religions, and retain links with their traditions.

The slow learners, taking it as a personal failure to communicate with the girls baffled the teachers. With experience, they realised that every group has 5-10 percent such girls, and have learnt to manage the learning disabilities as far as they can. Some teachers like Chandralata in Osian and Anupama in Phalodi camps have evolved their own techniques to communicate with these girls. The teachers also carefully nurture physically handicapped (usually polio stricken) girls. The older students also cooperate in integrating these girls with the rest of the group.

Scholastic evaluation

The pace of learning in the second half of the camp is very fast. The girls quickly outgrow the study material given to them. One of the biggest challenges is to devise a flexible and responsive curriculum that can address itself to the needs of the girls. The teachers and the master trainers have developed supplementary teaching-learning materials, and this has proved to be enriching for the classroom processes. In fact, the teaching-learning methodology has improved through the teachers' experience.

The local state-run schoolteachers do evaluation at the end of the camps. This ensures that the scholastic achievements of the girls are recognised by the system into which the girls will enter after the camps. The evaluation is conducted like the regular examinations and is recognised by the local educational administration. The results do prove the success of this rather unorthodox education system. The teachers of the local schools had been doubtful about the scholastic abilities of these girls, since it was difficult for them to believe that five years' curriculum could be done in six months. But they have tested the girls themselves and been surprised by the ability of the girls to achieve the standard.

Bidami of Nausar Village, Usian

Bidami is fourteen years old. The eldest of three sisters, she had seen their youngest brother go to school. Bidami comes from a Bishnoi community, where respect for nature and protection of the environment is deeply ingrained in the traditions and lifestyle. A lot of this responsibility rests on women. Bidami was always working at home and in their small farm.

She came to the camp on her mother's urging. Her father felt it was a waste of time – how would it help them, he could not understand. Bidami felt the same. Disoriented and confused in the first few days, she didn't know what to do, whom to ask. It all seemed too difficult. I don't know anything, she felt. All the girls felt the same. They started discussing it, and became friends. It began to be enjoyable.

Bidami slowly became confident as her teacher always encouraged her. Being older, she found she could understand things quickly. But, her handwriting – it was really bad. She sat with her teacher, she practiced late into the night. It worked, and Bidami started making charts for display in the camp.

Then her father came to fetch her. Bidami was to look after her siblings while her parents go to work. Bidami refused to go. The teachers tried to persuade her father, but failed. Bidami went and hid in the kitchen in despair. Her father waited the whole day, saw the way they lived and worked. Much moved, he relented. They would manage somehow at home. He even agreed to start sending her younger sisters to school.

Elated, Bidami excelled in her studies and hopes to go to school at the end of the camp.

Insights

For the teachers who have lived through several camps, the enthusiasm needs to be maintained. They feel a sense of repetitiveness and may in fact try to duplicate their earlier experiences. The insights that the teachers have gained by such intense interaction with the girls are invaluable. These have been incorporated in the design of the camps and the curriculum. For example, the teachers found a single blackboard inadequate for teaching a group of twenty girls who are not used to any writing. Now they are provided with as many blackboards as they need.

Respect, caring, nurturing – these are intangible inputs which cannot give quick results to be churned out in statistics, but are achieved with patience and genuine concern. The girls find the space to mature and learn in the nurturing environment of the camps.

Educational level reached in the third series of Adolescent Girls' Camps, 1998

: After 6 months in the camp

The Camp at Abu Road

Location	Grade					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Bail	8		44	14	18	84
Pokran		20	41	12	13	86
Desuri	18		17	21	40	96
Phalodi	4	9	30	33	23	99
Phalodi 2	6	13	23	24	40	106
Bikaner		5	24	14	72	115
Lunkaransar			22	29	49	100
Urmul	7	8	41	56	44	156
Mahajan		31	34	46	14	125
Dantor			22	28	30	80
Chholatan	4	16	18	13		51
Simalwara		11	10	28	32	81
Nokha		13	14	16	60	103
Abu Road	9	29	18			56
Total	56	155	358	334	435	1338
%	4.2	11.9	26.7	25	32.5	

Abu Road block has a male population of 41,532. Of them, only 9534 are literate and 2260 of 39078 women are literate. Forests dominate the area, home to Garasia tribes. Most of the block is inaccessible by road. Only one crop is grown in a year, and people seasonally migrate in search of work.

Aamia's father, an illiterate tribal, went away from the village as a construction worker. Her mother is also illiterate. But she wanted her daughter to study. Aamia could not go to school, it was just too far from their habitation. When LJ started a non-formal center in the nearby habitation, it seemed practical. But Aamia was only nine years old, too small to walk even two kilometers on forest paths.

The camp was an answer to their prayers. Aamia looked so small that she was almost sent back on the first day of the camp. It took Aamia many months to start talking in Hindi. She had a bright and effervescent personality, and was very popular as a mimic. She could read fluently, but writing seemed to be an insurmountable hurdle.

The camp came to end. Many girls were in the same situation. The distance between their life in the forest and the discipline required for schooling seemed too great. They needed

another chance, and urged their teachers and LJ workers. The parents, too, appreciated the predicament of their daughters and pleaded for the continuation of the camp.

The camp closed on June 14, 1998, and a month later an *Ashramshala*, or residential school was started by LJ. Fifty six girls from the camp returned to it, along with 20 new girls. The teachers were the same. The learning pace proved to be fast this time, and the new girls were helped in adjusting by the experienced girls.



Follow Up

The end of the camp is an intensely emotional experience for the girls. They return to their homes and two-thirds of them join the local school. The change from the lively environment of the camp to the school is profound. The pupil-teacher ratio in schools is very high, teachers are unable to pay attention to each child, even if so inclined. There is little interactivity and circumstance, which make learning a passive experience. The teachers follow the classical passive learning approach. LJ is maintaining an optimistic yet cautious approach to the girls' integration in the schools.

The follow up activities planned by LJ include monitoring the retention and performance, holding short-duration yearly camps, and maintaining a relationship with the girls through Adolescent Girls' Forums.

Follow up activities vary in every block. A series of 150 days camps are held to enable girls from their earlier camps to complete grade five. Two such camps are currently taking place in Phalodi and Bajju. The pace of learning is very good since the teachers and students already enjoy a good rapport.

Abu Road in Sirohi district faced a totally different problem. The girls, mainly from Garasiya tribe, could not move beyond grade 3 at the end of the camp in 1998. For their special needs, the camp has been converted into a residential institution till the girls are able to complete grade four or five. In four blocks all the girls from the camps have joined local schools at grade four, five or six level. Ten camps of five days are being held for them during which the post-camp experience is reviewed, scholastic difficulties are sorted out, reproductive health information is shared and efforts made to answer the questions raised by the girls.

Adolescent Girls' Forums, a regular activity under LJ, is being adapted for the girls from the camps. It is envisaged for groups of girls to get together and manage a mobile library. In addition, sports and recreational activities, workshops on reproductive health and community are to form part of these forums. Setting up the forums is made possible since LJ has a continuous presence in these areas and its workers are adept in maintaining relationships with the community.

Follow up activities should begin as early as possible after the girls return to their villages. It is an emotional setback for the girls to return to their homes if the environment is not supportive. This is especially true in villages where not many girls have attended a camp or go to school. The risk of the girls relapsing into illiteracy is very real. The workers need to be vigilant and keep the girls involved in other activities of LJ even if they are not able to go to school.



Social Impact

Several changes have been observed during and after the camps. Some are planned, others spontaneously, much to the delight of the LJ people. Upon return to their homes, the girls are encouraged to correspond with each other, their former teachers and LJ workers. This not only keeps them in touch with their friends, it keeps them informed about events in their region. The teachers become the role models for the girls, and experiencing a sense of achievement, a bonding with the girls who, at the beginning, seemed to belong to a different world.

The girls start blossoming in the caring atmosphere. Their personality develops; they become individuals, not faceless young women afraid of being different from others. The feeling of closeness experienced in the camps is a precious gain in their lives and they derive strength from the collective experience.

The realization of strength gives self-esteem, and leads to empowerment - which are the true goals of the camps, and indeed, of education itself.

Even when the girls visit their homes for holidays during the camp, they themselves note the difference in the way they are received. They take great joy in reporting that they are not referred as *çchorié* (a pejorative form of addressing girls) any more, but as a respectable young lady, *baiji*, and their wishes are given consideration in the family. Their self-image undergoes a sea change.

In the process, the sense of achievement extends to the LJ workers, members of the village Core Team, Women's Group, and ultimately to the whole community. The girls become a community resource and a role model for other girls. They compete with the boys in school. Having educated daughters has become a matter of prestige, and LJ workers are inundated with requests for holding more camps. Education has begun to be viewed as a step towards upward social mobility.

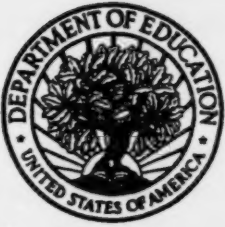
There are many indicators of the popular support for the camps for adolescent girls. Parents from even the most financially constrained families are willing to contribute in any way they can for their daughter. The expectation that a government sponsored project will provide all the money has undergone a change. In more and more villages, the local community offers money and materials for running the camps. The local cloth and grain merchants have contributed cloth and food grain. Even the teachers give their own clothes to some of the girls who come with only what they are wearing.

In most cases the lives of the girls have changed. One of the burning issues is of early marriages of girls, it has taken all the persuasive skills of LJ workers to delay the wedding of some girls to enable them to complete the camp. This has involved convincing the prospective in-laws too, who, in some cases have proved to be more flexible than even the parents. This does not, however, mean that all the girls have this support.

The ripple effect of a few educated girls in an illiterate village is felt from the beginning of a new camp. The glowing reports sent by the girls are an incentive for those who remained behind. One of the factors is that the parents feel it is easier to send the girl to a camp for a few months rather than to the local school, which may be some distances away, every day for five years. But these are hard facts that LJ confronts in the scattered desert and forest villages of Rajasthan.

Many questions endure in any intervention. Education is a fundamental intervention in people's lives, and it is necessary to carefully measure the criteria for its success. In the case of Adolescent Girls' Camps, the very holding of the camp can be considered an achievement. In areas where female infanticide is common, the fact that parents are sending girls to study in residential camps is a breakthrough. That they are creating conditions at home to free the girls from their responsibilities even at the time of harvest breaks the myths that justify low levels of retention in schools. Girls from all communities, many of them from *untouchable* background, eating and studying together can be said to be a significant step toward social integration. And that these girls perform well educationally and develop their personality in spite of discrimination and social prejudice is their triumph against all odds.

It is easy to be surprised in Lok Jumbish - it seems to have found some significant directions in the impossible challenges of adolescent girls' education in India.



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